



**City Of San Diego  
COUNCILMEMBER TODD GLORIA**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

**DATE:** July 28, 2009

**TO:** Council President Ben Hueso  
Honorable City Councilmembers

**FROM:** Councilmember Todd Gloria *Todd Gloria*

**SUBJECT:** Re: City Council Water Action Initiative

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Throughout the Western United States, global warming is squeezing traditional water supplies as drought becomes the rule rather than the exception. San Diego currently imports almost 90% of its water, and we are feeling the effects of global warming induced drought. Deliveries are falling from our two main sources of imported water: the Colorado River and the State Water Project. Because the environmental changes that have caused these reductions are likely to continue, San Diego faces a permanent water crisis. However, this crisis is also an opportunity for us to be bold and make great strides towards self-reliance and sustainability in the years ahead. We must seize this opportunity by promoting conservation and developing new local water supplies.

After consulting with my constituents over the past four months, I believe that the best way to encourage further conservation would be to give San Diegans greater financial incentives to conserve. Currently, fixed charges comprise most of the total water and sewer charges for ratepayers, such that reduced consumption yields very small proportional reductions in the overall bill. The Water Department could increase the financial returns to conservation by charging higher rates for greater usage. To ensure fairness, a tiered pricing structure like that developed in the Irvine Ranch model could be combined with property allocations based on objective criteria (such as lot size, number of residents, microclimates, etc.) as well as safeguards for low income ratepayers. Also, the City should work with the San Diego County Water Authority to explore ways to augment the incentive and rebate programs for water efficient appliances that are currently being cut by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Increasing these rebates, especially for those with low or fixed incomes would go a long way towards helping those San Diegans invest in conservation, who

otherwise would be financially unable to do so. Additionally, the City must do more to help new buildings use water more efficiently. As Chair of the Land Use and Housing Committee, I am currently working on a sustainable building ordinance that will encourage energy and water efficient development in San Diego.

Reducing demand for water through conservation and sustainable building is only half the solution to San Diego's water crisis. Ultimately, San Diego must develop new local supplies to replace future reductions in imported water. The two most promising local water supply sources are wastewater and storm water. Both options would treat the large amount of water that currently flows out to sea through sewer pipes and storm drains to augment reservoirs and aquifers. Wastewater and storm water are the two largest untapped sources of water in the City of San Diego.

Both options pose particular infrastructure challenges. Building an indirect potable reuse (IPR) system that successfully allows the maximum reuse of wastewater would require the construction of additional treatment plants as well as a conveyance system to augment existing reservoirs. Though the planning and financing of such a system would be challenging, moving forward with IPR is much more cost effective than continuing to build a parallel water delivery system for landscape irrigation (purple pipe) or trying to purchase more imported water.

While the City has taken some initial steps towards planning and design with the 2006 Water Reuse Study and the current Indirect Potable Reuse/Reservoir Augmentation Demonstration Project, more needs to be done. In particular, the City should design any initial IPR system with future expansion in mind so that initial steps put us on a path to reusing as much wastewater as possible. Long range planning for such a system should begin as soon as possible and run concurrently with the Demonstration Project. San Diego has been trapped for too long in the stale debate over whether recycled water is safe to drink. Local governments from Northern Virginia to Orange County have shown that IPR is safe and have bolstered their local water supplies by aggressively pursuing it. Had San Diego seized the initiative during the previous drought and pursued IPR in the early 1990s, we would be in a much better situation today. We must not make the same mistake now, especially given the severity and permanence of today's water crisis.

San Diego's current storm water system is not designed to capture storm water. Instead, like most traditional storm water systems, San Diego's storm drains were designed to move water as quickly as possible out to the ocean. This mindset has begun to change because of greater knowledge of the negative effect of polluted urban runoff on coastal and estuarine ecosystems. In fact, the City's innovative Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan includes an Urban Runoff Management Plan as well as the Think Blue educational campaign. San Diego's Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan has been a model of how to reduce pollution in urban runoff for other cities throughout the nation. I am convinced that the logical next step of this program is to capture this storm water, treat it, and use it to replenish aquifers and supplement water supplies. I urge the City's Water and Storm Water Departments to work with the Regional Water



Quality Control Board and other interested parties to develop a environmentally sustainable storm water capture system.

Indirect potable use of wastewater and storm water capture not only provide a new sustainable source of local water, but also would help the City comply with the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit as required under the Clean Water Act. IPR would reduce the pressure on the Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant, while storm water capture would help the City mitigate non-point-source pollution from contaminated urban runoff. By pursuing both options, the City would not only gain additional water supplies but it would mitigate existing environmental damage.

Though the water crisis that faces us is grave, I am confident that with innovative ideas and bold leadership, San Diego can adapt to the drier climate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

TG/ab/tk

cc: Honorable Mayor Jerry Sanders  
Honorable City Councilmembers  
Andrea Tevlin, Independent Budget Analyst  
Jan Goldsmith, City Attorney  
Jim Barrett, Director, Public Utilities  
Alex Ruiz, Assistant Director, Water Department